

PROJECT 33

Anri Sala

2017

The Last Resort

13 October – 5 November 2017

Observatory Hill, Sydney

BIOGRAPHY

Anri Sala's works of film, sculpture and installation create poetic analogies that reflect on life and culture from different frames of experience. Past works have traversed European contexts, from his hometown, Tirana, Albania, to Germany and France where he has spent much of his adult life. His films balance allegorical and symbolic subjects, presented as simple narratives that often creatively pair image with sound, and explore the choreographic potential of musical instruments and their performers. Sala has represented France in the Venice Biennale, participated in documenta 13, Kassel, and has presented solo exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Paris, and New Museum, New York.

FACTS

- During a visit to Australia in 2012, Sala became intrigued by the chasm between 18th-century Europe and early colonial Sydney, between the ideals of the Enlightenment period and the devastating impact of conquest and colonisation.
- *The Last Resort* responded to the social and cultural significance of the Observatory Hill site and its layered histories.
- Suspended upside-down from the ceiling of the Rotunda, an ensemble of 38 snare drums played a pre-recorded, reworked version of W.A. Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A Major, K.622.
- Recontextualising a masterpiece of the Western Classical canon, Sala's installation expressed the changes that occur across time and distance, and revealed new perspectives on the historic location.
- The second movement, the Adagio, or slow movement, featured in the work. Sala rearranged the tempo of the Adagio, altering its pace and flow to reflect wind conditions described in the diary of sailor James Bell, during his 1838 voyage to Australia.
- Bell's daily journal entries commence with a description of the weather, and Sala draws on this document of time, experience and personal journey to manipulate the composition.
- Attached to each drum, a pair of drumsticks beat their own rhythm, adding a layer of live percussion to the recorded music.
- Inside each custom-built drum, two hidden speakers played the layered composition. One played a rendition of the orchestral music, the other an inaudible low-range frequency, causing a strong vibration, and triggering the beating of the sticks.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

A multichannel installation of sound and sculpture, inhabiting the Observatory Hill Rotunda on what was once Sydney's highest point, *The Last Resort* by celebrated French-Albanian artist Anri Sala was a beguiling and resonant reflection on history, nature, sound, place and perspective.

Born in Tirana, Albania, Sala grew up under the repressive communist regime before moving to Paris in 1996, and soon drew attention for his intriguing and audacious work. Encompassing video, live performance, musical recordings and installations, his practice brings together music, sculpture, space and architecture to explore themes of loss, language, dislocation and disruption.

In this storied Sydney Harbour site, the audience stepped beneath a gravity-defying ensemble of custom-built snare drums suspended upside down from the ceiling of the rotunda. There they experienced a rhythmic, live response to Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A Major, a seminal musical expression of the Enlightenment.

While the Enlightenment gave rise to democratic ideals, it also triggered the dispossession and destruction of Indigenous cultures across the world. Seeking to "compose with corruption", Sala displaced the adagio tempo of the concerto's second movement with wind conditions described by sailor James Bell in his *Private Journal of a Voyage to Australia, 1838-39*.

Mozart's score was upended, as if it were a message in a bottle carried across the ocean to Australia, weathered by wind and waves as it drifted across time and space, echoing the way that shifts of location, time and perspective alter intent and meaning. "Upside down in the Observatory Hill Rotunda," wrote Australian academic Ross Gibson, "here is a western cultural treasure that has been troubled by its new location so that it cannot sound sure and enlightened".

Writing in the Sydney Morning Herald John McDonald described how the installation "invites us to appreciate the beauties of the harbour and of Mozart's Concerto, but also prompts more critical reflections ... If ever this city manages to have an open and honest discussion about the role of public art, Sala's ingenious Kaldor project would be an ideal place to start".

The Last Resort was later presented at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2018, and Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, 2018.

Kaldor Public Art
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Anri Sala,
The Last Resort,
Observatory Hill
Rotunda, 13 October
-
5 November 2017
Photo: Pedro Greig



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Photo: Cassandra
Hannagan

